

ROUGH DRAFT

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Biography of:

JAMES MONROE GRAHAM
Farmer & Blacksmith
(Mar. 9, 1853 to May 2, 1932)

Wife:

ELIZABETH JANE FLEMING
(Nov. 25, 1853 to June 24, 1927)

Issue: Perline Elizabeth, Middleton Curtis, Benjamin Franklin, Sarah Emily, Francis Marion, William Aaron, Newton, Jasper, William Smith, Joshua, Bessie Beulah, and Cecil

*Some
relatives you
know & your
mother included
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James Monroe Graham was born in Rusk County, Texas, on March 9, 1853, the birthday of his father, Jesse Abner Graham I. Jesse, born in North Carolina, had moved as a teenager with his parents, John and Mary Graham, to North Alabama, where he married Martha Jane Fanning. Jesse and Martha Jane had ten children before leaving Alabama in 1849 and moving to Rusk County, Texas, where James Monroe was born.

Monroe, as James Monroe Graham would be called, was still an infant when his parents moved from Rusk County to Coryell County. His mother, Martha Jane ("Patsy" to her friends), had her hands full during the move by covered wagons without having to care for an infant, but was said to always find time for Monroe. Of course his two older sisters, Martha Jane and Hulda Ann, helped with his care to free his mother for cooking and other chores during the move. His brother Frank, who was four years older, occasionally got to run and play alongside the wagons with the older children during the move, but most of the time he was retained inside the wagon. Occasionally Jesse would let them sit alongside of him on the wagonseat and watch the world go by from those heights.

Coryell County, a portion of the hill country of Central Texas, was almost unsettled when Jesse moved his family into it. Although the lush prairie and supple streams beckoned the settlers, Comanche Indians inhabited the area and did not welcome the white eyes. For their protection, a detachment of U. S. Army troops had been stationed at Fort Gates until 1852. But Ft. Gates was abandoned, and the settlers had to furnish their own protection. Monroe was raised in those perilous times.

Jesse registered a claim on 800 acres in the Brown's Creek area, and built a substantial home for his family. In addition, he built two separate Baptist churches, both of which he pastored. Many records show his involvement in religious, community and government affairs, but none have been found to show the early provisions for the education of his children in Coryell County. Early county records show that A. J. Blackwell, a relative through Jesse's oldest daughter, was licensed to operate a school in the Brown's Creek region, but since no record has been found for the enrollment at the Blackwell School, it is not known if Jesse's school-age children attended it. Presumably the last three children, Jesse Abner II, Hulda Ann and Benjamin Franklin, older than Monroe were eligible to attend upon arrival in Coryell County in 1855 because their ages ranged from twelve to six. Monroe was only two. However, it is known that in later years the Graham children, including Monroe, were attending the Brown's Creek School, Dist. #32. It was a one-room building that also served as a community center for other activities.

As Jesse was a "circuit preacher" for several Primitive Baptist churches within the Concord Association, he was frequently gone from home on his rounds. And in 1865 the oldest son at home, Jesse Abner II, married and left home. Management of Jesse's farm and ranch became the responsibility of Benjamin Franklin, Monroe's older brother, who was only 16, and Monroe, who was only 12. But although

young, the two young men did an admirable job of farming and attending the livestock. Jesse had a herd of well-blooded horses which Frank and Monroe cared for with special attention. Both young men would carry their love for horses into their adulthood.

When he was twelve, Monroe had an encounter with the Comanche Indians who still inhabited Central Texas. He was living with his uncle, Gideon Graham, the younger brother of Jesse, presumably to be more convenient to school. He became homesick once, and decided to go visit his mother - although he was warned of the presence of hostile Indians. Enroute, in an area where the road passed under a low bluff, Monroe spotted a party of Comanches just above him, and at the same time they spotted him. He was very frightened, as was his horse who sensed Monroe's fright and bolted down the road with Monroe clinging to his back and the Comanches in hot pursuit. His horse was a buckskin from his father's string of race horses, and was very fast. He had soon outdistanced the Indians' horses so far that they gave up the chase. When Monroe's mother saw a rider approaching and recognized it to be Monroe, she was horrified because she knew Comanches were in the area. Once again the Graham relationship with horses had stood a Graham in good stead with survival.

~~Frank and Monroe became ever closer~~ as they matured. They were not only brothers, they were best friends. So close was their relationship that in the early 1870s they married sisters in what Burleson Graham described as a double wedding near Holland, in Bell County. However, another source gives Frank's and Monroe's wedding days on different dates. But as Burleson is not only a grandson of Monroe, but an experienced genealogical researcher, preference is given to his information. In any case, the two brothers' close relationship carried throughout their lives. They lived and worked closely in Central Texas, and in West Texas where they later moved, and they were buried in adjoining grave plots.

In 1871 Monroe and Frank married into the Fleming family, which traces back to William of Orange. The head of the family in 1871 was William Fleming, who was born in Alabama, and with his wife, Perlina, moved to Texas in the late 1840s.

One source stated that William first settled near Caldwell in Burleson County, Texas, later moved near Holland in Bell County, and then after losing his land near Holland in a title dispute, he moved to Oregon. However, Texas census records indicate that William had a son born in Gonzales County in 1850, and that William's daughters, Sarah and Elizabeth Jane, were born in 1851 and 1853 respectively in Gonzales County. Therefore, it appears that William's and Perlina's first home in Texas was in Gonzales County. Whatever the case, one day in Oregon William announced that he was returning to Texas to die. He returned, and lived but a short time in Texas before he died.

William, like Jesse Graham, was a Primitive Baptist preacher. He had no congregation, but was a "circuit preacher" who traveled a "circuit", or route, stopping at established places to teach God's word as he understood it. Some of those places were certain homes in which some of the faithful would gather, country stores which would accommodate small meetings, and schools which were used for places of worship on weekends. William received no salary for his ministry. Like other circuit preachers, he believed that his reward would come in Heaven!

It was near Holland, Texas, on 25 May 1871, that James Monroe Graham married Elizabeth Jane Fleming. They made their home first in Bell County, and then moved to Coryell County where he farmed for a few years. Often tiring of farming and in search of new opportunities, he moved to other counties and took on other jobs. Some of those moves took him to Kimble, Menard and McCulloch Counties, according to Burleson Graham, who also states that Monroe had returned to Coryell County by the time of his father's death in 1887.

In the Graham tradition, Monroe became a freighter. Bales of cotton had to be hauled to railheads for shipment to cotton mills, and lumber and finished goods were hauled on the return trips. Mules foaled from Jesse's well-bred horse mares and mammoth jack-ass studs were used by Monroe to pull his wagons, and their exceptional strength and speed, managed by Monroe's good teamstership, gave Monroe a competitive advantage as a freighter.

Burleson Graham related a humorous incident in Monroe's freighting career. He was freighting out of Salado, Texas, and had to ford the often treacherous Salado Creek with his team and wagons. Upon reaching the far side of the creek, he discovered he had forgotten to load a keg of nails. Rather than turning his team and wagons and refording the creek, he returned to the supply store on foot across a suspension foot bridge. With the keg of nails on his muscular shoulders, he began the return trip across the suspension bridge. But because the weight of the keg unbalanced his weight, the suspension bridge began bucking and swaying - progressively worse with each of his footsteps. To compensate for the bridge's erratic movements, Monroe began taking longer and longer steps, the spectacle of which was funny to everyone but Monroe. By the time he reached the far side of the bridge, his desperate and pogo-like steps on the madly bucking bridge were causing a lot of laughter.

The Coryell County census of 1880 showed Monroe living in Coryell County with his wife, Elizabeth, and four children. Monroe was listed as a farmer, age 28; Elizabeth as 26; Perlina, 8; Curtis M., 6; Benj. F., 5; and Emily, 4. Also living in Monroe's residence was a brother-in-law, Elisha Meekham, 25; his wife, Perlina, 24; and their daughter, Lizzie, 2. Perlina Meekham was the former Perlina Fleming, a sister of Elizabeth Jane. Monroe's residence was adjacent to Jesse's farm.

In October of 1887, Jesse died. Monroe remained in Coryell County for a short time, and then moved his family and Elisha Meekham to Borden County. They drove the cattle and sheep overland, a drive that required 21 days.

The soil of Borden County did little for the farming and ranching efforts of Monroe's family, but it yielded Monroe a recognition in another regard. On his farm he unearthed the bones of a very large prehistoric reptile, likely a dinosaur. The height of the creature was estimated to have been about 28 feet. Through an agreement with one of the state agencies, Monroe constructed a special wagon and took the bones to Dallas to be exhibited at the Texas State Fair.

Open range land and good wool prices had attracted Monroe and Elisha to Borden County, but a severe drought and tumbled wool prices soon drove them out. Elisha returned to his family who he had left in Bell County, and Monroe removed his family to Stephens County.

In the Gunsite community of Stephens County Monroe had a conflict with the Klu Klux Klan. The incident was recalled by Burleson Graham, to whom Monroe had told the story. The home of a young couple who lived next to Monroe was invaded by a group of Klansmen one night in their typically cowardly manner. By treachery they tricked the young man, seized, and hung him.

Monroe was shocked by the Klan's criminal actions, and expressed his disgust to several men in town. They cautioned him to conceal his feelings, lest he become their next victim, but Grahams have never failed to speak out for social justice. Monroe let it be known what he would do to the guilty Klansmen if he ever discovered who they were.

Soon thereafter, Monroe was visited one night by the Klan. Hearing them out behind the hogs, he picked up his rifle and went to meet them. What a picture it must have made to the Klansmen to see Monroe, a 6'4" muscular giant, gun in hand and resolutely coming toward them - shooting as he came! They turned and ran, and never returned. As far as is known, none were killed, but it is doubtful that Monroe would have mourned the loss of one or more of the hated "Whitecaps", as they were called.

It is interesting that Monroe did not relate the above story to his descend-

ants as a matter of crucial importance. The frontiers of Texas in those days were unsettled and uncivilized, and confrontations such as Monroe's with the Klan were regular events in the course of progress.

Monroe's next move was to Eastland County, states Mrs. Inez (Davis) Roland, a granddaughter of Monroe and Elizabeth. He located near Hogtown, the name of which was later changed to Desdemonia. Monroe was a blacksmith there, and one of his daughters, Sarah Emily, married Scott Davis while the Grahams were living near Hogtown.

Life in Hogtown was no more civilized than it was in Gunsite. A story was conveyed to typify the primitive community of Hogtown by Lt. Col. Monroe Graham, a grandson of Monroe's. On Saturday afternoons the cowboys of the surrounding ranches came into town to hobnob at the saloon, and by the time they left to ride home in the late evening, most were irresponsibly drunk. Before leaving town, they rode through it several times, shooting their guns and whooping it up. Monroe calmly took his family into the storm cellar each Saturday evening before the shooting started, and remained there until the shooting stopped. As the last cowboy rode out of town, the citizens emerged and proceeded with normal life until the following Saturday afternoon.

A few years later, Monroe and his oldest son, Middleton, bought about a section (640 acres) of land near Trent, Texas. Trent was in Taylor County, but their land was in Nolan County, of which Sweetwater was the county seat. Their property was approximately fifteen miles east of Sweetwater in the White Flat community. (White Flat was originally called "Graham's Chapel" before it was called White Flat.) The area was to become a focal point for several of the Graham families. Monroe and Middleton built their homes on the new property, and moved there in 1901. There was a school at White Flat, and all of the school-age Graham children attended.

An interesting sidenote to Monroe's sale of property in Eastland County is that a few years later one of the most productive oil fields in Texas was developed around Desdemonia. And the richest well in the Desdemonia Field was drilled on the land that Monroe had sold!

Several factors influenced Monroe's move to Nolan County. One was that the Comptons, the parents of Middleton's wife, Dora May, lived there; and it was no secret that Dora May wanted to live near her parents. Middleton did not follow the Graham family to Swisher County a few years later, probably for the same reason. Another attraction for Monroe in Nolan County was one of his relatives who lived there, Jehu Graham, who was well established and respected in the area. Jehu was the oldest son of one of Monroe's older brothers, Dr. William Smith Graham. Will had moved to Sweetwater in 1881 and died three years later in 1884. Jehu had located near the school at White Flat, and Monroe and Middleton located very close to Jehu.

Eddie April (Pass) Graham, the widow of Ben Leslie Graham, who was the oldest child of Jehu Graham, is still living and vital at 92 years of age, and recalled her introduction to the White Flat Community before she met and married Ben Lesslie. The Pass family, her parents, had moved to White Flat from Coryell County, and Eddie enrolled at the school, which was called the Elm Creek School. The teacher was William Aaron Graham, the fourth son of Monroe and Elizabeth. Eddie recalls the year as 1906, and said that all of Monroe's children younger than Aaron attended school that year. Those children were the twins, Newton and Jasper, William Smith, and Bessie Beulah.

Eddie said that "Mr. Aaron" was one of the best teachers she ever had. Particularly was he good at teaching Geography. He made little rulers for the students' tablets, and longer ones for the chalkboards, and taught the students to draw maps like the ones in their books. Because of his creativity in teaching, Eddie gained a lasting love for Geography, and a lasting respect for Aaron.

Monroe's house was one-half mile west of the schoolhouse on the south side of the road that has become the main road between Dallas and El Paso. Just west of Monroe's house was the one of Middleton, and one-half mile further was the home of Monroe's second son, Benjamin Franklin "Ben" Graham, and his wife, Jennie. Monroe's oldest daughter, Perline (called "Plina"), who had married J. A. Trimble, and her daughter, Lola, were living with Monroe. The younger of the twins, Jasper, had become ill with "Pellagra", which in those days the doctors did not know how to treat. He was confined to a wheelchair, but improved from time to time. Before his death in 1914, he proposed to Eddie Pass, who was already secretly engaged to Ben Leslie Graham, the refusal of which was a dilemma for her. While there was no doubt about her intentions to deny Jasper's request, she was apprehensive that she may hurt his feelings. However, she tactfully explained her engagement to Ben Leslie, and Jasper - the fine young man that he was - understood, and remained friends with Eddie until his death.

A large movement of the Grahams from Nolan County to Swisher County began in 1908 when Bessie Beulah married Sidney J. Payne and moved near Tulia. She was very tearful, and expressed fear that she may never see her family again. But a few months later Monroe's brother, Frank, sold his farm in Coryell County and moved to Swisher County, and within two years Bessie's entire family, except for Marion, Middleton, and Emily were living in Swisher County.

The 1910 census of Nolan County shows Monroe and Elizabeth living in Nolan County with their widowed daughter, Perline Trimble, 37, and son Jasper, 23. Living on an adjoining farm was Middleton Curtis Graham with his wife, May, 24, and two children, Ruby (11), and Monroe (8). Next to Middleton was Sarah Emily and her husband, Scott Davis, and children: Borden, 9; Ocie V., 7; Perline Inez, 5; and Barney, 2. In Swisher County, the Census of 1910 shows Monroe's son, Benjamin Franklin Graham and his wife, Jennie, with no children. Monroe's brother, Frank, lived on the next farm with his wife, Sarah A., 58, and two daughters, Myrtle, 18, and Willie, 16. Frank's daughter, Bertha Mae, and her family of Hilliards lived next to Frank.

Monroe and Elizabeth moved to Swisher County in the latter part of 1910 and bought a farm. ~~It was located about five miles east of Tulia,~~ and consisted of about a section of land. A small portion of it was cultivated, and the remainder was used for grazing Monroe's cattle. He also raised some hogs and chickens.

Inez Roland related one of her personal experiences that involved a trip on a train from Sweetwater to Tulia. Her mother, Sarah Emily, the second daughter of Monroe, and her father, Scott Davis, had remained behind in Nolan County when Monroe moved to Swisher County. Emily took Inez, who was six years old at the time, and Inez's younger brother on the train to visit her parents in Tulia. It was their first ride on a train, which was a big event for all of them. In that era, all polite women wore hats in public, so Emily had taken special care that Inez was properly dressed - including the wearing of a hat. But as they boarded the train and Emily discovered that all children seven years of age and older had to have a ticket, she had Inez remove her hat lest the conductor perceive her as being older than six and insist on her having a ticket! Inez is 83 years old, as of this writing, and remembers as the highlight of her first train trip - an event of 77 years ago - the significance of removing her hat.

Monroe's oldest child, Perline, married a Trimble in 1892. He is said to have drowned soon after their marriage, possibly fording a flooded stream, but one daughter was born to their union in 1894. Her name was Lola. She married Herman Cockrell, but died of typhoid fever while pregnant. After the death of her husband and daughter, Perline lived with her parents during their remaining years. She was loved and respected by her siblings and their children.

Frank Graham died in 1916, after which his wife, Sarah, visited with Monroe and Elizabeth much of the time. She is included in most of the family photographs

of that era. Perhaps she spent the remainder of the time with her daughter, Bertha Mae Hilliard, but she apparently felt comfortable in Monroe's house with her sister, Elizabeth. It was typical of Monroe to open his house to friends and relatives, particularly those in need.

For a man with limited formal education, Monroe was a very informed person. Among his areas of expertise, he was an authority on the Comanche's use of the bow and arrow. Perhaps his skirmish with the Comanches as a twelve-year old prompted his study of their fighting methods! At any rate, he made the following observations, which were later reenforced by R. C. Crane:

"The Comanche warrior made no effort to achieve individual accuracy with the bow. He fought at long range as part of a fighting unit. His practice with the bow consisted of shooting for range or distance when a squaw was near to retrieve the arrows, or for speed which was shooting straight up when he had to chase the arrows himself. He could shoot about 400 yards with sufficient velocity to kill, and he could keep four or five arrows in the air at once.

When a band of Comanches attacked, they tried to surround the enemy on an open plain, galloping around the target in a huge circle just beyond range of the defender's rifle. At a given signal certain warriors from all around the circle advanced at a run, loosed a few arrows and retired. As the first detachment returned to the line, another advanced and fired and so on throughout the attack." The Indians could, in three or four minutes, have enough arrows in the air to pierce every square foot of a target the size of two or three circled wagons. It is claimed that the Comanches were never defeated except by surprise or on broken terrain.

As Monroe aged, he rented his farm to Sidney Payne and moved into Tulia in retirement. Although his health failed rapidly from onslaughts of arthritis, he and Elizabeth were able to enjoy the rest of their married life. They were visited often by their children, and their grandchildren stayed over on occasional weekends.

Dr. Ronald Graham, a grandson of Monroe, is a physician in Junction, Texas. He recalls that ~~as~~ a child he spent several weekends with his grandparents. Elizabeth was a petite lady who catered to her grandchildren, and Monroe was a gentle and kindly man who spent most of his time in a rocker on the back porch smoking his pipe. They had an old phonograph that played cylindrical records. Ronald frequently played it, and remembers his favorite cylinder, "The Preacher and the Bear."

In 1921, Monroe and Elizabeth celebrated their Golden Wedding Anniversary. Dr. William Graham, a dentist living in Borger, Texas, and a son of William Aaron Graham, was present for that celebration. Although a child, he remembers it as being a festive event. Besides having a large family, Monroe and Elizabeth had many friends, and everyone gathered to honor this grand old couple.

Elizabeth died in 1927. Her death ended an era of 56 years of loving companionship for Monroe. She had been everything that he had wished for. Together they had faced the rigors of frontier life, and she was in every respect his equal. The spark that she ignited in Monroe's eyes would never again glow as brightly.

Perhaps to escape the remorse of Elizabeth's passing, Monroe and Perline drove Monroe's car to Coryell County to spend the winter with Monroe's relatives. Frank had died in 1916, and with the death of Elizabeth, Monroe returned to the land of his youth. However, like so many who return to lands of happy memories, Monroe discovered that with time the old landmarks disappear, old friends vanish, and acquaintances change. "Home" is not the same. With a certain resignation he returned to Tulia with Inez Davis, who had caught a ride with her Uncle Newton from her home in Tahoka, Texas, to Coryell County to drive Monroe and Perline back to Tulia. Monroe spoke but few words during the trip.

Monroe died in his chair on the porch in Tulia in 1932. Travis Payne, a grandson who lives in Roaring Spring, Texas, remembers the event. Monroe

had suffered greatly from arthritis, and had become very stooped. Four men were required to remove his body from the chair and lay him on a door to carry him. It was fitting that several men were needed to carry the body of that great man in death, for in life he had carried legions of people. He was buried in the Rosehill Cemetery at Tulia, Texas, and at the present there are eleven other Grahams buried near Monroe's grave.

Senator Gid Graham, a grandson of the elder Gideon Graham, Jesse's brother, wrote The Dawson-Graham and Allied Families in 1938. He knew Monroe personally, and said the following about him: "Monroe Graham, as he was called on the Cow House, was an optimist and a splendid citizen; raised a superb family and lived to see some of them achieve success as farmers, stockmen and jurists...." As Gid was highly successful in public life, his commentary on Monroe has a special credibility.

Old-timers had a reliable yardstick for measuring the worth of a parent. That yardstick was the quality of the parent's children. By that measure, Monroe and Elizabeth scored exceptionally well, because their children were exceptional people, as are their grandchildren with whom this writer has corresponded. Inez Roland said that everyone who knew Monroe's children had nothing but praise for them. Elizabeth occasionally raised her voice at home at the children, according to Emily, but what parent has not? Or should have? Inez recalls that when her mother, Emily, was on her death-bed, a registered nurse who was a neighbor and an old friend, was called in to attend Emily in her last hours. The RN told Inez and her brother, Borden, that she had never heard Emily say a harmful word about anyone, and that in turn, everyone had good things to say about the Grahams.

It took men of Monroe's character, purpose and strength to develop the old West. We who glide in our space-age chariots over Central and West Texas, gazing over cultured fields, residences and industries, can hardly appreciate the severe hardships those worthy frontiersmen endured - indeed, took for granted and expected - to make it possible. We can be thankful that they had a vision, and the courage and strength to pursue their dreams.